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Taft, William Howard

An address before the  
Electrical Manufacturers'...

[Philadelphia]

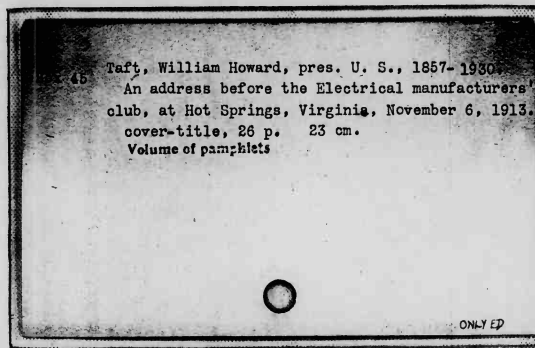
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# An Address

By

WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT

Before the Electrical Manufacturers' Club, at Hot Springs,  
Virginia, November 6, 1913

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Box 45

Sent out with the Compliments of George H. Palmer

115 Jan 3 4-17

The following address was delivered by Hon. William H. Taft to the members of the Electrical Manufacturers' Club on the occasion of their annual meeting on November sixth, 1913, at Hot Springs, Virginia.

The Club, in printing this address, desires not only to give it permanent form, but to obtain for it a wider publicity than would be possible were the paper to remain only in the archives of the Club.

A. B. HOUGHTON, Chairman	}	Committee
L. A. OSBORNE		
A. D. PAGE		
L. M. DOWNS		
H. B. CROUSE		

GENTLEMEN OF THE ELECTRICAL MANUFACTURERS' CLUB LADIES  
AND GENTLEMEN:

I propose in this paper, which you have been good enough to invite me to prepare and read, to discuss the Signs of the Times. Under this title I shall consider the causes which have led to our present somewhat confused and chaotic conditions, political and social, to consider the present symptoms which are manifesting themselves, to determine what of these are ephemeral, and what are indicative of a permanent change for good or evil, and how far by the united efforts of those who see them clearly, the dangers of the present situation can be neutralized or mitigated, and the part of our heritage from our ancestors in this Republic that is valuable and indispensable can be retained for the benefit and happiness of the present and coming generations. It is most difficult for one drawn hither and thither in the conflicting currents of politics and society to tell clearly in what direction the main stream is really tending. I have been reading a most interesting book called "The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century," in which the author traces the history of the controlling causes of progress from the Christian era to the beginnings of the 19th Century as a basis for a subsequent consideration of the epoch-making character of that century. The relatively small importance of many movements that seemed to contemporaries to be controlling and the insignificant part

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that men of prominence in their day really played in the light of such a history, make one hesitate to express a judgment on current events and discourage effort through individual activity to check dangerous national or race tendencies. Such a review leads almost to **fatalism** and a sense of submission to whatever may come, and a paralysis of effort to make things better. It produces a benumbing sensation like that which affects one who, while excited by the critical importance of the affairs of his own community, is suddenly introduced by an astronomer to a study of the universe, and whose imagination is thus stirred to comprehend the many times greater worlds than ours that are being drawn through infinite space at a speed beyond our conception.

Yet this is the only world we have, and for Americans, our is the only country we have, or are ever likely to have. Our earthly interest in it is limited to one or two or at most three generations; and while we, as individuals, can make hardly a ripple in the general current of world events, as seen from the standpoint of an historian of centuries, we cannot and ought not to escape by such a plea, personal responsibility for what happens around us. Those who, in the genius of their writings and their deeds have made themselves world figures and really played such a part in civilization's advance as to keep them on the stage of history forever, have only embodied and given expression and effect to the spirit of progress that has lain, uninterpreted, in the minds of their contemporary fellowmen. Therefore, it falls to everyone who is a member of the community of any age to do his little part to help the welfare of the body politic and the body social, with the hope that through his effort, united with that of millions of others, there may develop, in one or more, a genius of leadership and a movement of progress in the right direction. It is in an humble spirit, therefore, and with no cocksureness that I take up this subject that attracts me much, with the hope that I may perhaps effect a little in the interpretation of the confused tongues we hear to-day.

The material progress of an age is very much easier to describe with accuracy than the moral and intellectual changes. No one can question the enormous and most exceptional material advancement that the 19th century has brought to the world and to this country. The changes which have been effected by the application of steam to machinery and by the innumerable improvements in mechanical devices and their application to transportation, to agriculture, to

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manufactures, and in other ways, have wrought an improvement in the comfort of life for every individual that can be measured without surmise or conjecture. The electric telegraph, the application of electricity to mechanics, the electric light, the electric motor, the electric street car, the telephone, the automobile, with the numberless devices for increasing the productiveness of labor, have reduced the cost of the necessities of life in everything but food and have brought easier living to the great mass of the people. Of bodily comforts, the humblest laborer to-day has more than Queen Elizabeth, in the heyday of her power, or indeed than George III. These comforts we have grown so used to, that everyone feels them a necessity, and holds a deprivation of them to be a cruelty and a suffering. Statistics show, too, that wealth and capital have increased in **greater proportion** than the **population**. The average wage, in spite of the high cost of living, furnishes to the laborer a much closer approximation to the possible comforts of the rich than ever before. The public, through the Government, is doing much more than formerly in caring for the unfortunate, in offering opportunity for self-elevation to the poor youth of the community, and in spreading general education among all classes. But human nature has not been changed, and this betterment of material comfort and this greater approach to equality of opportunity do not satisfy the average man or check his desire for further improvement, or silence complaints over things that are. **It is well** that this is so. If it were not otherwise, there would be no hope of future progress. This discontent with what we have is at the bottom of all energy and activity that make for further accomplishment. But while this spirit is indispensable to progress, it may, if wrongly directed, manifest itself in such a way as to **retard** further progress by sapping the foundations of that already made. The truth is that so much progress has been made, so many things have been done which it was thought could not be done and were beyond the conception of men a century ago, that many intelligent people, infused with the confidence of success, are **dangerously conceited** as to what we can do in the future. We are told by radical leaders that we should not hamper ourselves by lessons from the past, that we have entered upon a new era that opens possibilities that were never dreamed of, and in the onward march to something very like a millennium, "He who dallies is a dastard and he who doubts is damned," or, as Lowell in his Bigelow Papers put it,

"For John P.  
Robinson, he  
Says they didn't know everthin'  
Down in Judee."

Yet it is often just at the time when the confidence of would-be leaders is greatest, that a danger suddenly makes itself clear and the unexpected catastrophe comes to show their lack of judgment and their failure to appreciate the real effect of that which they unwisely advocate.

"There are no pages in history more instructive," says Lecky, "and there are few which are more humiliating than those which record the judgments of great thinkers and politicians on the verge of the changes that have most profoundly affected the destiny of mankind."

"Though for a long time," says Marmontel, regarding the violent change in government which he lived through in France—"Though for a long time the situation of public affairs and the fermentation of men's minds through all ranks of the state, appeared to threaten the approach of some great crisis, it is nevertheless true that it (the change of government) happened, through the imprudence of those who obstinately persisted in thinking it impossible."

These quotations, which I take from the installation address of President Hinman, of Marietta College, are apt in considering our present situation.

The causes of the present conspicuous tendencies in our American civilization to-day it is difficult to state separately and with accurate definition, because they run into each other. But it may help to try to do so, however imperfectly, as follows:

1st. The great crusade of the people of the United States against the imminent danger of plutocracy due to corrupt corporate control of politics and government agencies.

2nd. The increase of the real spirit of brotherhood in society and the increased sense of responsibility of each for the other and of all for one.

3rd. The growth of Trade Unions in number, membership and power.

I shall take up these causes in their order and attempt to trace out the effects that have followed them, both good and bad, and

finally consider the reason for hoping that the bad effects may ultimately be minimized.

1. The enormous expansion in wealth and population that came to this country after its recovery from the immediate effects of the war, between the resumption of specie payments in 1878 and 1900, dulled the sensibilities of the people in the discharge of their political duties. They sympathized with, and were much affected by, the great plans for extending the investment of capital in railroads and other enterprises and its profitable return. All were intoxicated by the brilliancy of business achievement, and the attention and energy of the people were focused on the material task of developing our resources. This created a prodigal liberality and unwise tolerance in the granting of opportunities for the private exploitation of what really should have been restricted to the benefit of the public, and led to too little censure upon the control which those in charge of great enterprises began to exercise over politics, legislatures, municipal councils, and even Congress. This was not all of it brought about by direct corruption, but much was effected through more insidious influence, and by furnishing the funds that political exigencies in important electoral contests called for. The time was, and we all know it, when in many of the directorates of the great corporations of the country, orders for the delivery of delegates in a convention and of members of the legislature for purposes of corporate control were issued with the same feeling of confidence in their fulfillment as an order for the purchase of machinery or the enlargement of the pay-roll. Finally the danger of such political control by combinations of capital forced itself upon the people. Their interest in our material expansion began to pall and their moral sense was aroused. Throughout the country began to be manifested a determination to destroy the power of the plutocracy. In the last ten years we have seen this work done. We have seen the wrath of the people thus aroused make itself felt in legislatures, in the Congress and in elections, while the great corporations have been relegated to a position of serving the public interest and of regulation by public authority. The interstate commerce railroads and all other public utilities have come under government or state scrutiny and control and a revolution in the relation of such quasi public corporations to the public they serve has been effected. Combinations of capital in corporate form that have used illegal and improper means of suppressing

competition in order to maintain monopolies and control prices have been brought to the Bar of Justice. The prodigality of the United States Government in its land grants and the opportunities it gave to private investors to possess themselves of the natural resources which lie in the public domain, in mineral wealth, in forests, in water power, and in supplying other industrial needs, attracted the condemnation of the public, and led to a program of conservation so strict indeed that the people of the States in which it is to be carried out have resented the extremes to which they think it has gone in the withdrawal by executive order of these resources from any kind of use by them in the development of their local communities. We are now in a transition period, in which a plan must be formulated more carefully guarding the ultimate rights of the public and the ultimate control that may be retained over the use of such resources. Corporation franchises are scrutinized with much greater care. Lobbies have been regulated. The suspicion that corporate agencies are at work for any candidate greatly impedes his chances of election. Corporations have really been driven out of active political work. The cry of bossism was never so potent as a campaign argument against a candidate or party supposed to be controlled by a regular machine. Every one with the good of his country at heart must rejoice in this crusade and its chief effect. Corruption has not disappeared entirely, of course, but the political atmosphere has been cleansed of the poisonous miasma that was threatening the Republic's life.

It is impossible, however, to **arouse a leviathan like the people** to spirited action and **limit that action to judicial measure**. After the people have accomplished their purpose, they not infrequently pursue it with excesses which are ill advised, which will prove to be dangerous to the public weal in the long run, and from which, after actual trial shows their evil effect, the people's good sense will lead to a wise reaction.

The conditions under which plutocracy became so threatening occurred under a representative form of government, both in the states and in the nation, and the corruption was, much of it, effected through members of legislative bodies. The argument that the representatives of the people are not to be trusted and that the representative form of government is responsible for the corruption which obtained, therefore, had great force with the people and has led to a profound popular distrust of legislatures and municipal

councils. They fail to perceive that under the influences that were controlling and under their own neglect of their electoral and political duties, **any** system of government would have yielded the same discouraging results. But the **mind of the enterprising American turns to machinery as the cure-all for everything**. It makes him impatient to be told that effective changes to accomplish good results must be slow, must be detailed, must be studied. He wishes to treat people and human nature as he does matter, and to think that the analogy of the devices for the use of steam and electricity and for the wonderful saving of labor can also be followed in the realm of politics and in government and in the improvement of a people; and, therefore, he **ignores the real cure which is in greater activity by the people themselves** in the discharge of their political duties and greater care in the election of their representatives and greater scrutiny of their conduct. But this is a slow and tedious process. It is one that does not **show itself at once** on the statute book or in concrete form. It has been easy, therefore, for the inventors of patent devices for the improvement of general conditions to convince the people that it was the old machinery of government that was the cause and not the people themselves. They are told, and believe, that it was the system that permitted the manipulation of the wicked men and not the neglect of the electorate that made the evils of the past possible. The representative system has, therefore, been made the subject of condemnation and popular disapproval under this propaganda, and a wave has swept over the country for its abolition, or at least its substantial modification, through the introduction of direct government by the electorate. The initiative, the referendum and the recall, together with a complete adoption of the direct primary as a means of selecting nominees and an entire destruction of the convention system are now all made the *sine qua non* of a real reformer, and everyone who hesitates to follow all of these or any of them is regarded with suspicion and is denounced as an enemy of popular government and of the people. Such denunciation finds great sympathy in many quarters.

But not only is our representative system attacked, but because we had courts during the time when the plutocracy nearly gained mastery, the same kind of an argument is directed toward them. As they were institutions under which these abuses were possible, they too are said to be lacking in the proper elements needed to



secure the rights and happiness of the people and a radical change must be made in them by a recall of judicial decisions, a patent device, the approval of which is also made an indispensable article of the faith of a real progressive. The result is the doctrine that to prevent the possible future triumph of corruption through the representative system, and by acquiescence of the courts, the people must be given means of **direct expression not only as to what the law shall be, but what it is.** It is said we can only have a popular government by having the people make laws at the polls and over-rule judicial decision at the same place. **All questions of right and justice and of equity are to be settled by election.**

Senator Lodge, in one of his addresses, has quoted from a very great historian, Lord Acton, a passage which is so apt, I cannot refrain from repeating it. Lord Acton was speaking of the spirit of the Athenian Democracy. He said:

"The philosophy that was then in the ascendant taught them that there is no law superior to that of the State—the lawgiver is above the law.

"It followed that the sovereign people had a right to do whatever was within its power, and **was bound by no rule of right or wrong** but its own judgment of expediency. On a memorable occasion the assembled Athenians declared it monstrous that they should be prevented from doing whatever they chose. No force that existed could restrain them; and they resolved that no duty should restrain them, and that they would be bound by no laws that were not of their own making. In this way the emancipated people of Athens became a tyrant; and their Government, the pioneer of European freedom, stands condemned with a terrible unanimity by all the wisest of the ancients. **They ruined their city by attempting to conduct war by debate in the market place.** Like the French Republic, they put their unsuccessful commanders to death. They treated their dependencies with such injustice that they lost their maritime empire. They plundered the rich until the rich conspired with the public enemy, and they crowned their guilt by the martyrdom of Socrates.

"When the absolute sway of numbers had endured for near a quarter of a century, **nothing but bare existence was left for the State to lose; and the Athenians, wearied and despondent, confessed the true cause of their ruin.** \* \* \* The repentance of the Athenians came too late to save the Republic. But the lesson of

**their experience endures for all times, for it teaches that government by the whole people, being the government of the most numerous and most powerful class, is an evil of the same nature as unmixd monarchy, and requires, for nearly the same reasons, institutions that shall protect it against itself, and shall uphold the permanent reign of law against arbitrary revolutions of opinion."**

It is exactly this spirit that has prompted the pressing of the so-called reforms known as the recall of judicial decisions. It is said that there is to be no divine right of judges; that they are nothing but the servants of the people, and, therefore, they must decide as the people will have them decide. What is the decision of the people thus relied on? It is ascertained by the plurality vote of the electorate at a single election. Now who constitute the lawful electorate? They are not twenty per cent. of the whole people, probably considerably less. At the elections in which there is the greatest popular interest, perhaps 75 per cent. of those entitled, vote. That is a high percentage. At other elections, the percentage will run down to 65 per cent. A majority or plurality of that percentage gives expression to what is said to be the voice of the whole people. These percentages are shown in the election of officers; but when it comes to the direct vote by the electorate upon measures, under the initiative and the referendum, we find that the proportion of those who vote is generally not more than 60 per cent. and not infrequently as low as 30 per cent. of those who vote at the same election for officers. What then is the result of the calculation? The total electorate does not exceed 20 per cent. of the population. At ordinary elections, not presidential, the total vote is only 65 per cent. of this 20 per cent., or about 13 per cent. of the total population, and of this it is fair to say that upon referendums there is not, on the average, a total vote of more than 50 per cent. of those who vote for candidates at such elections. The total vote, therefore, upon referendums is about 6½ per cent. of all the people and a majority of that, or something more than 3 per cent. of the people are supposed to express in their votes at one election that popular will which is to be the standard of righteousness and morality and of equality and justice. Of course where at a subsequent election the same small body shall take a different view and establish a different rule of righteousness and justice, there may be some embarrassment.

In the wave of popular approval with which these new remedies are received, it seems useless to point out that it is not the representative system that is to blame. The system works well when the people are aroused. There has been no difficulty in making it do the will of the people when they take a little trouble. The present reforms they have effected under it, leave no doubt of that. Moreover, how is this new machinery going to work any better when the people grow lax again? To make it work properly, much more political activity is required of the people than that needed in the representative system.

By the instrumentality of the initiative, from 5 to 8 per cent. of those of the electorate who register are permitted to compel the submission to the electorate of any measure they may devise. This has put the power in the hands of cranks and blind enthusiasts to increase the burden of the electors so much that many fail to discharge their electoral duties. The result is an enactment of laws by small minorities and not by the people at all.

It is no answer to all this to say that those who do not vote, forfeit their right to do so. In voting they are not doing something for themselves alone; they are exercising a trust for the whole people, and the great majority of the people who are not given the franchise have the right to insist that all vote so that their welfare may be protected by the average intelligence and patriotism of the whole electorate. It too often happens that the multiplication of the duties of the electorate is much more likely to keep the intelligent from the polls than those less qualified to vote rightly. Clearly, therefore, the representative system with any proper degree of popular attention is certain to result in laws which much more certainly reflect the real public opinion than this so-called direct machinery.

More than this, the tendency to submit legislation to the referendum grows until we have the result that thirty or forty different complicated laws are submitted to the people, involving the printing by way of explanation and with arguments *pro* and *con* of a volume of two hundred and fifty closely lined pages in order that the people may know what they are to vote upon. Of course the result is that in respect to many such laws whose effect is indirect or not easily understood, the election is no test of public opinion at all. With the initiative, which seems to be regarded as an inseparable companion of the referendum and to which I shall make

further reference, the form of the law to be enacted is left to the coterie who get up the required petition. There is no method of amendment or legislative discussion over its sections or language. The electorate must accept or reject it as a whole. It is hardly necessary to point out what gross errors can creep into such legislation and what an opportunity for "jokers" of which we have heard so much. Is it any wonder that, with thirty or forty laws to read and secure some dim idea of, with a volume of 250 pages to digest, the voters, many of them, go to the polls, vote for the candidates and decline to vote on the laws submitted to them? The fact has already been stated that the ballots cast on laws initiated and referred vary all the way from 60 per cent. of the votes for candidates at the same election in some states to 25 per cent. in others. Is not this an eloquent witness that the electorate itself in its heart favors the representative system under which it considers itself competent to select agents to do its legislative work but has neither capacity nor time to attend to it directly? What is true of legislation is equally true of judicial questions to be submitted to voters under the fantastic system of recall of judicial decisions.

Another and most dangerous result of this direct government and direct judicial decision by the people is utterly to break down the sanctity of our constitution as fundamental law and to make no distinction between an appropriation bill and a bill of rights. It takes away all the security we have in the constitutional guaranty of personal rights. The constitution loses altogether its function as a restraint self imposed by the people upon the temporary action of the electorate. It is a little startling to think that if these new methods are to be introduced into our Federal System as proposed, there is nothing we hold dear in our individual rights of life, liberty, property, that might not be seriously impaired, and infringed by the result of one election. Of course the adoption of these nostrums in such states as have adopted them do not now seriously affect even the citizens of those states in the security of the rights they enjoy because the Federal constitution and the Federal Courts offer a bulwark of protection upon which they can still rely. But the advance is upon our Federal system and it is formidable.

In the founding of our government, in the Civil War, and from time to time at various crises, we have shown that we were a moral people, that through the majority of our electorate we

could manifest high ideals, make real sacrifices and exercise self-restraint. But these judgments were after long contests in which there were many elections indicating a temporary prejudice and error. If we now give up the restraining influence of a constitution upon temporary and fitful popular expression, who can tell the disasters that may follow?

### MUCKRAKING

The stirring of the people against the influence of corporate influence in politics necessarily involved personal attack upon prominent leaders under the old system, and the impeachment of the purity of their motives. This was doubtless justified in many cases, but **it was so effective as a campaign weapon that it became the vogue** to attack all public men and to fill the press and magazines with unfounded allegations and insinuations against their integrity. Matter of this kind came to be known as "muckraking." It had a bad effect. It sowed suspicion of all men in political life in the minds of the people. It kept the reading public in a state of **constant and morbid expectancy**, and their appetites were whetted for coming revelations showing corrupt rottenness in new quarters. Years hence the historian will study the events of recent congressional sessions at Washington and will find it difficult to understand the political advantage that could lead the Houses of Congress to occupy so much of the public time, waste so much of the public money and so greatly interfere with the cause of government business merely to give currency to sensational statements impeaching the motives and besmirching the character of prominent persons **from the lips of self-confessed perjurers and political hirelings**. I ask you what the historian of this century will think when he considers in the headlines of the press the importance attached to the revelations of Colonel Mulhall, or to the fifty other examinations and investigations upon the event of which the hearts of political Washington stood still in anticipation of the popular earthquake that was to follow their disclosure. During that period, the terrorism that prevailed was in a sense equal to that which we read of being produced by the deposit of accusations in the lion's mouth to be considered by the Council of Ten in Venice. And yet **what has it all amounted to in giving substantive facts for the useful information of the public?** Who can remember one important circumstance brought out?

I don't mean to say that this muckraking for purely selfish political and journalistic profit has not had an effect upon the public. I think it has. It has had an evil effect. It has had a tendency to **destroy respect** for knowledge, for experience and for honorable public service. It has impaired the authority of those who should be real leaders of public sentiment. Beginning with those real malefactors of wealth against whom just criticism may be aimed, it extends to all that part of the community that have been successful in business, and they are held up as enjoying their success and comfort at the expense of the needy and unfortunate who are treated as the victims of society. All this movement toward direct governmental action at the polls accompanied by class antagonism tends to create not the **safe party divisions by vertical lines**, in each of which various classes of the community are represented, but a **horizontal cleavage** in the electorate producing a faction, filled with a consciousness of new power, inspired by persistent suspicion of, and hostility to, the well to do and the more intelligent, and seeking to induce those who have little, to unite and form a party whose aim shall be to control the government and to adopt radical changes in our political institutions. It needs no seer or oracle to tell the result if this succeeds. The guaranty of personal property rights in the constitution would not be worth the parchment it is recorded in.

A faction means a group in the electorate constituting either a majority or minority which allows its policy and action to be **controlled wholly by selfish desire for its own benefit**, or by unjust bitterness toward others in the community differently situated, and which is not moved by any appeal to a broad spirit of patriotism and interest in the general welfare. Madison, in Chapter 10 of the Federalist, spoke of factions when he said:

"If a faction consists of less than a majority, relief is supplied by the republican principle which enables the majority to defeat its sinister views by regular vote. \* \* \* When a majority is included in a faction, the form of popular government, on the other hand, enables it to sacrifice to its ruling passion or interest both the public good and the rights of other citizens."

I do not intend to be understood as asserting that the movement toward the form of government by the initiative, referendum and recall finds its main-spring in a factional spirit like this. I have no doubt that it was, and is, chiefly promoted by a feeling that such

machinery would prevent a recurrence of corruption in legislative bodies under the representative system, and **without any realization of the peculiar evils of their own which the new devices would in practice develop.** But I do mean to say that the arguments of many of the leaders in the movement tend to rouse a spirit of faction and class hatred and are intended to implant in the minds of a majority of the electorate a consciousness of the power that its members have by mere union to make the policy of the government what they choose, to gratify their feeling against those whom they suspect and dislike, and **all this without sense of responsibility to any one.** Such a feeling on their part is greatly increased by the attitude of these leaders toward the courts and the doctrine that the will of the people is the basis for all justice and equity and morality, and that the only infallible standard is the result of a single election on any question of law or ethics. These elements add to the lack of respect for authority already referred to. The factional principle is not equality of right before the law, not equality of opportunity, but equality of knowledge, equality of character, equality of experience. One man's judgment, one man's motives, one man's knowledge, one man's experience are just as good as another's. It is **the philosophy of the dead level,** the destruction of real leadership and the elimination of any such thing as **quality** in citizenship or political usefulness. It has been well said that the future success of popular government in its numerous and increasingly complicated functions is going to depend upon **its power to avail itself of the service of experts,** of men qualified to give to its necessary work the highest efficiency. It is hardly necessary to point out that the spirit I have been describing is utterly at variance with the use of such assistants in government.

I come now to the third phase of the aftermath of the popular uprising against political corruption. It was not to be expected that there should be a nice discrimination between honest capital and honest investments of a corporate character and those whose managers used abhorrent means to control politics, although, of course, a broad distinction between them has always existed. The crusade has necessarily carried with it a popular distrust and hostile scrutiny toward all corporate investments, leading to some ill-advised legislation and executive action, adopted to meet what has been thought to be the public demand. The consequence has been to make capital timorous, and to halt new and large investments.

It makes the refunding of railroad and other corporate bonds and stocks difficult. It frightens those whose confidence in our business strength as a country once made a most valuable European market for our securities. This is a part of the cost of a real reform that we are bound to meet and pay, and all we can do is to hope and pray that the unreasonable hostility to legitimate corporate prosperity will exhaust itself before it brings about such interference with our business conditions as to throw a great burden on the poor people of the country.

#### SPREAD OF FRATERNAL SPIRIT

2. I come now to a change for the better in society which is countrywide, and which it is a real pleasure to dwell upon. I refer to a change from the commercial spirit and intense selfish application to business and the making of money, to a marked **increase in the responsibility that members of society feel for those who are suffering and are in want,** who have been unfortunate in the race of life, who are oppressed by present conditions, and who need help to enable them to share in the general improvement in bodily and domestic comfort of the community. There is no mistaking the existence of such a spirit, and it finds expression in several ways. In the first place, it would seem as if the game and pleasure of the pursuit of the dollar and the increase of capital and the enormous material development due to this had palled on the public taste and had brought home to the members of the community a sense of the narrowness and selfishness of it all, unless its highest development helps to abate the suffering, hardship and misfortune in the lot of everyone. It seemed to arouse a shame in the whole community that they had been intoxicated with material success, and it gave them a pause in which they stopped to consider the fate of those who in spite of the brilliant achievements of the business community, did not share in the result. Nor can we ignore in this reaction toward a wider charity and a deeper human sympathy, the strong influence of the crusade against plutocracy to which the people were aroused. That intensified the self-condemnation of society, and gave additional zest to the reaction. One of its signs has been the greater responsibility that men of wealth have shown not only in their great gifts to philanthropic causes, but in the time and effort that they have been willing to take in order to see that their money thus given would be effectively spent, and become

a real aid to the beneficiaries intended. Nor has this movement been confined to those who have had money to give, but it has widened greatly the organization of private charities by the effort of people of moderate and of little means, and much increased their activities. It has developed the science of sociology, and stimulated public interest in it. It has led to a change in governmental policy. Under the *laissez faire* school of economists, the paternalism in government had been regarded as vicious. The warnings of that school have been ignored, and the public funds raised by taxation have been devoted to the most extensive plans for increasing the opportunities of the poor to secure an education not alone of a primary and secondary character, but of practical use for vocational purposes. Great improvement in the health agencies in the community has been effected. Many phases of human suffering and hardship in great communities not before known have been brought to public notice. Legislation improving the housing of the poor has become general and provision at the public expense has been made for their amusement and recreation. The same impulse has led to the pure food, and the white slave laws. It has given us the free rural delivery, the postal savings bank and the parcels post. It has prompted the effort by law to limit the hours of labor, to compel the furnishing of safe and healthful places in which, and safety appliances with which, to work. It has led to the change of relations between employer and employe, putting the latter on a plane much nearer that of equality in dealing with his employer than was his condition under the common law. It would be impossible to enumerate the great variety of laws which have been enacted under this inspiration and which are working benefit for the poor, the needy and the suffering, as well as for the community at large. This stirred human sympathy is nowhere more emphatically shown than by the recognition it receives at the hands of the press, from the pulpit, and by the politicians. It means, I believe, a permanent change in the attitude of the general community toward those of its members who, whether through their own fault or through their own weaknesses, find themselves in a slough of despond from which they need outside aid to rescue them.

#### SOCIALISM

Great as has been the benefit of the uprising against corrupt politics and of this wider human brotherhood, however, we cannot

ignore the eagerness with which the state of public mind has been used by wild enthusiasts to promote the coming of state socialism in which it is proposed to absorb all the privately owned sources and means of production and put them under the operation and control of the government, and following in its wake is the movement toward a socialism pure and simple which in one form or other ultimately involves the serious impairment of the right of property, the taking away of the motive which is indispensable to human material progress and the substitution of an arbitrary method of determining by executive tribunal the rewards which members in the community are to receive for their contributions of effort to the common weal. The danger from this should not be treated lightly. There are many who are being carried along unconsciously by their enthusiasm for the betterment of mankind to the final advocacy of such doctrines. Of course they look with very great favor upon any system like that of the initiative and referendum and the subserviency of the courts to electoral decisions, because thereby the guaranty of private property may cease to obstruct the realization of their theories and hopes.

#### POLITICAL USE OF WIDER HUMAN SYMPATHY

Cunning politicians and demagogues, not socialists, do not hesitate to use the wider human sympathy for selfish political purposes and in so doing they arouse in one an indignation like that of Dr. Johnson when he said that patriotism was the last refuge of a scoundrel. A reflection of it, too, is in a kind of hysteria among the weak and impressionable in the community, and in the outbursts of maudlin sentimentality, colored by prejudice and factional spirit against the well to do. This impetus to wider interest in charity has led many people of most excellent intention and earnest enthusiasm in the community to focus their eyes on the suffering in the community, and to consider only the hardship and sin which are gathered together in certain nuclei in large cities. Their view comes to be that a civilization which permits such degradation is one to be utterly condemned. They lose their sense of proportion. They are unwilling to admit that government cannot do everything. They fail to recognize the immense progress that has been made in the average comfort and happiness of the individual in the country as well as in the cities. They estimate the whole value of society by its success or failure in reforming the particular evil which has

claimed their earnest sympathy and aid. To secure a reform of this, they seem to be willing to sacrifice anything else in society. Of course this leads to a perverted view of what is needed for the community in general.

Consider the investigation into the cause of prostitution and the effort to make the proprietors of co-operative stores and other large employers of female labor responsible for it, on the ground that they don't pay enough wages to their employes to enable them to live without vice. Could anything be more unjust than this charge of conspiracy against the virtue of young womanhood? Could there be a greater lack of judgment and sense of proportion than in this sensational hunt for some other explanation of crime and sin than that, we already know, of the weakness of human nature and the yielding to temptation? What injustice is done to the virtue of American womanhood by the suggestion that because a woman only gets \$7.00 a week, she must yield to vice. It is common knowledge that women seek positions in stores and in factories because the hours are short and they have an independence that they cannot have if they become domestic servants. Yet in domestic service, with the comfortable homes they would have, their real compensation and their opportunity to save would be greatly better. It is difficult to secure good domestics and the field is not crowded. Therefore, the unfounded alternative conclusion to which these investigators are driven in their woeful logic is that young women prefer a life of sin to the restrictions of service in a family.

The truth is that the present interest in the welfare of humanity and the disposition to use governmental machinery and laws to promote it, offer an opportunity that is eagerly seized upon by officious busybodies, who are seeking the limelight, and wishing to reform, not themselves, but other people. There is nothing quite so satisfactory as to become virtuously indignant about the mote in somebody else's eye and to enthuse about its removal. There is no royal road to learning; neither is there to moral betterment of the world. Obstructions to progress may be removed in the form of unjust social laws and conventions, and in the furnishing of greater opportunity for everyone to lift himself. Individual suffering may be alleviated by charity, but in the end society must depend for its advance on the moral fabric and stamina of the individual man or woman, on his industry, his staying powers, his courage in over-

coming obstacles, his resistance to temptation, his providence, his self-restraint, his willingness to make sacrifices to accomplish his purposes, his foresight in neglecting the temporary gain to seek the permanent advancement, his sense of duty, his sense of loyalty to those he serves, his mental and moral honesty and his proper ideals. Life to be useful and successful cannot be easy—character is made by struggle and difficulty. We are tending to flabbiness of moral muscle. In many a sense, we are sparing the rod and spoiling the child. We are hunting scapegoats for the sins of the individual.

Take another instance. A gentleman went to the penitentiary, clothed himself as a convict, and remained in prison a week. When he came out he made the announcement, which was headlined in all the newspapers, that life in the penitentiary is unpleasant. It was treated as a discovery. He also said that ripe pears were rotting on his farm that the convicts would enjoy eating. Now of course it is of the highest importance that our criminals who are convicted should not be treated with cruelty and should have their surroundings as healthful as the necessary condition of confinement will permit, but the penitentiary is not provided for the purpose of making the life of the persons who are detained there a picnic. A penitentiary is, by the very derivation of the name, a place for punishment. Such misdirected sentiment grows out of the same spirit to which I have referred, of treating the convicts as the victims of somebody else and of hunting some scapegoat upon whom to put the burden of their sins.

Another person who had the ear of the public and probably will receive it again, a man of great literary talent, the unworthy son of an honored sire, goes to the penitentiary involuntarily, and after he has served his term for an offense against honesty, comes out and announces the beginning of a crusade for the better treatment of criminals, on the ground that heredity and their environment are the occasion for their crimes.

These instances are all of a piece with the apparent view of many people that Thaw is a hero and defender of social purity, struggling for liberty, instead of the degenerate and dangerous paranoiac that he is, with a taste for the limelight and money enough to secure it. It is rather gratifying that this indiscriminating hysteria manifested itself in Canada as well as here because it shows that we are not alone in the possession of many foolish people.

In the new school of political philosophy, the common law principle of society, that every man should be allowed freedom to **enjoy his rights so long as he does not injure the rights of another**, is rejected and instead it is said that the proper goal of society should be to satisfy the wants of everyone in so far as that is consistent with satisfying the wants of others. Without discussing the difference, if any, between these two views, I wish to speak of a doctrine that sounds a little like this latter day philosophy.

The principle of the kindergarten, of awakening the desires of the child for information and then of gratifying the desires thus awakened, for a time spread to all grades of education, and the purpose seemed to be to make everything as easy as possible for the student. This was a great departure from the **safe old method of developing strength of character through a training in the overcoming of obstacles** and the doing of things which the learner did not wish to do. Under the old system, his brain cells which did not respond well to certain mental effort were made to develop as dormant muscles in the body are developed by exercise. For some years the new liberal optional system had the warm approval of the authorities in several Universities. It was **tried and its demoralizing effect proven by experience**. A reaction from this view greatly to the benefit of the educated youth of this country is already here.

But the most absurd evidence of the weak and flabby sentimentality that has followed in the train of the present social tendencies is in the **strikes of school children**. In several cities children to the number of one thousand have struck because a board of education or a school superintendent has seen fit to transfer a popular principal to some other school. The children have gone to their homes and told their parents, and **those silly parents**, far sillier than their children, have encouraged them and taken pride in the action they had taken. Nothing could have occurred more demoralizing to the children, more destructive to all discipline leading to the development of good character than this. Instead of encouraging them and feeling pride in what they had done, each parent ought to have spanked his child and stood for the authority that the child's highest welfare required should be sustained. This was a **referendum to the children**. It was the logical outcome of the doctrine of **general equality of knowledge, wisdom and experience**, and rested on the proposition that the children ought to be treated as knowing as much about who was a good principal as either the

school superintendent or the Board of Education. I cannot think that such exhibitions of **mushy sentimentality** and such lack of virile common sense are anything but a passing symptom of the extremes to which the so-called reform sentiment will carry some foolish people. But these are among the signs of the times and are instances of that lack of respect for authority, learning, wisdom and experience which is **needed to steady society under popular government**.

#### TRADES-UNIONISM

3. A powerful force among the social currents of the day is that of trades-unionism. It had its beginnings in a just demand on the part of the workingman that he be accorded an **equality of position in dealing with his employer**. Alone he was subject to the overwhelming power of the man who, or corporation which, paid him wages. United with his fellows in a demand for an improvement in his condition, with the threat of their leaving the employment in a body, he put himself at once upon an equality with his employer, and the effect has been clearly visible in the industrial history of the country. It has greatly improved the condition of those who labor. It has done more. The members of the various trades-unions thus organized combined for political action, seem so formidable that their leaders have been able to command the attention of legislatures and of Congress and to secure many legitimate enactments for their industrial betterment. I have already referred to many. The safety appliance acts, the labor hours laws, the change of relations between the employer and employee in dangerous employments, and the workingman's compensation act, were **all due to the intervention of labor unions**. It was not that their forces were so large, because the **unorganized part of labor is much more numerous than the organized**, but it was that as between the parties they seemed to hold a balance of power, and they have exercised the utmost ingenuity to make it felt. But they have their serious faults. The danger of trades-unionism is that in the desire to present a solid front, they **make a level of efficiency among their members, and in so doing they level down and not up**. They have a tendency to take away the incentive to good work because they insist upon **equality of reward** for their members, though they may differ in the effectiveness and skill of their labor. Indeed the spirit of trades-unionism in its determination to **sacrifice the interests of all other classes to the promotion of its members** is a selfish develop-

ment that really cannot be reconciled to the general movement toward the welfare of the entire community. The rider on the Sundry Civil appropriation law, exempting them from anti-trust law prosecutions under the specific appropriation of that law, was a most glaring example of their willingness to terrorize Congress into securing special and undue privilege for their own class.

The selfish disregard of the interest of the community was seen in the unanimous vote of the New York and New Haven engineers to give their leaders authority to order a strike because the heads of the railroad were determined to change a seniority rule so as to secure competent engineers, and this even after the loss of many passengers' lives in a number of awful accidents, some of which were due in part to the incompetency and lack of care of the engineer.

This class spirit of unionism is seen in the refusal of the leaders properly to condemn murders admittedly committed by the explosion of dynamite to terrorize people into acquiescence in the demands of certain unions.

#### CONCLUSIONS

I have thus reviewed what seem to me to be the three strongest currents in our present political and social condition. The movement toward the initiative, the referendum and the recall is growing and the danger of injury to our form of government and our constitutional protection is threatening. The duty of those who love their country and see clearly the dangers I have pointed out is by a constant propaganda to bring before the people the inestimable value of the government we have and the irreparable loss that we shall sustain in weakening the solid foundations upon which we have attained our present growth. We must talk out and tell the truth. We must not be discouraged by electoral defeats, we must not be discouraged by a lack of popular discrimination between the causes that are good and the tendencies that are unwise or disastrous. We must rely on the bitter lessons of experience to make them heed our warnings and to restore them to the common sense view for which the American people have in the past been remarkable.

The system of states, with some conservative and others radical, makes for a check upon an immediate adoption of all these new and dangerous nostrums, and the Federal form of government

is more difficult to change than that of any state. As long as we retain the Federal Constitution and the Federal Judiciary, we can be sure of the conservation of those elements of our strength as a people and a country that have enabled us to live through many more threatening crises in our history. The tendency to state socialism will be hindered by the failure of public credit. Contending candidates for office who promise to substitute new governmental agencies for private enterprise will be embarrassed by inability to float municipal and state bonds. The impossibility of raising the necessary funds for such schemes except by incurring great unpopularity in higher taxes, will tend to prevent a rapid advance in this direction.

In respect to the initiative, we shall find that the extreme activity of the cranks and promoters of fads in submitting legislation to the people will ultimately **so tire and disgust them** that if they do not abolish the initiative, they will at least impose such conditions on its use as to make it comparatively harmless, and when the initiative is thus restricted, and the referendum is then left to the discretion of the legislature to use or not, this new machinery will be practically consigned to the scrap heap. It is said that the granting of power to an electorate operates like a ratchet wheel in mechanics, and that **any power granted can never be withdrawn**. But **this has exceptions**, and there is nothing so likely to create an exception as **the nuisance character** of the initiative, which cannot but in the long run irritate the electorate.

In respect to trades-unionism it will always be with us, and it ought always to be with us, but its political power is not as great as the politicians suppose. They will find this out. It has not the solidarity in political action that it claims. **Men have defied its power and been elected**. Such exhibitions as it made in the McNamara case, in the Heywood case, and that it came near making in the New York and New Haven case have weakened its influence and will tend to restrain it to a more reasonable exercise of its power.

One of the developments in trades-unionism is the outburst in various labor centers of the Independent Workers of the World. Their doctrines of annihilation of society and their battle cry, "No God, no Country," and their reckless spirit of anarchy are a **blessing in disguise** in their good effect upon the spirit of modern trades-unionism, and have illustrated to organized labor and to the com-



munity at large what may be the result of failing to restrain tendencies to lawlessness and a disregard of authority and hostility to society in general that not infrequently have shown themselves within the ranks of organized labor. The controversy in the trades-unions between those who favor and those who are opposed to socialism is an excellent circumstance that, as it continues, will tend to clarify the issue and demonstrate the **utterly chimerical character and the entire hopelessness of the socialistic theory.**

I have not the slightest idea that we are coming to socialism and the taking away of the stimulus to human progress in the right of private property, but the question is how near we shall get to it and how far we shall need to retrace our steps.

I am glad to think that this spirit of universal brotherhood has aroused the churches to extra effort, and while we find **hysterical clergymen** yielding to what they think is the movement toward a millennium and embracing all these new nostrums, we can be sure that as the church goes on and **regains** the authority that it has lost, it will make for righteousness, **for equality and justice** and for a conservation of those pillars of government and of society involved in a preservation of individual rights and in the integrity, independence and high sense of justice of our courts.

We shall find in the working out of economic laws and the jolts that will be given to those who would ignore them, severe lessons that will have their effect and will prick the bubble of demagoguery by hard experience. Capital can easily take wings and when we find both the public and the private credit exhausted for lack of general security in society, we shall begin to realize how dependent the prosperity of all is on **doing justice to those who have saved and accumulated that without which material progress cannot be made.**

Therefore, while I think that probably the tendencies that I have described will grow stronger for a time and the conditions they cause will grow worse,—perhaps they must grow worse before they grow better,—in any case, we have a right ultimately to rely on the ability of the American people, not at one election and not at another, but in the course of a decade or a generation, to learn the lessons that bitter experience will teach them, to return to so much of the old institutions as that experience shows to be valuable, and to preserve the heritage which as Americans we ought to be proud to enjoy and protect, of the best government that was ever devised for securing the wise and beneficent rule of the people.

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